



The sorcerer, dead 300 years, turned up to act the role of himself on the play's opening night.

THE MAD MONSTER STRIKES AGAIN

by ALDEN FRANZ



The man in costume wasn't following the script. With a howl, he leaped upon Carol, knocked her on her back.

"CAROL, if you're not doing anything special after work, how about going with me to that meeting I told you about? It won't be anything great, but I guarantee you'll have a good time."

Carol Connors looked up from her typewriter and smiled at Mary. She said OK and went back to typing. Actually she was pleased at the invitation. Although she had only been in New York for a little over two months, she already discovered how difficult it was to make friends in the great city. Her tiny room in the cheap but clean woman's hotel got pretty lonely at night, and this was the

first time she had something definite to do after work.

Mary, who worked with her in the secretarial pool of a large insurance company, was more or less involved with a small amateur acting group and the meeting she had mentioned was called to discuss plans for a new play to be put on in the near future.

Five o'clock came and the girls left the office, had something to eat in a nearby restaurant, and got on a subway. The acting company's theatre was located in lower Manhattan.

"To tell you the

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truth," Mary admitted, "theatre' doesn't quite describe our place. It's more like a loft with a couple of folding chairs set up. But the people are really great and I'm sure you'll like them."

They approached the studio and went up four long flights of steps to the studio.

"Hi, everybody," Mary cheerfully called out. "This is Carol. She's interested in joining the group."

"You've come at a great time, Carol," a nice-looking man in jeans and a work shirt said. "We really need new members." He stopped hammering a set and walked over to the girls. "Hi. My name's Jim Gathway. I'm sort of the director around here."

"What do you mean 'sort of'? Carol," Mary confided, "this guy runs the whole show. And if he weren't so good at it, nobody could stand him. Talk about being pushy!"

The three of them laughed. Then Mary excused herself to paint some flats. Jim asked Carol to help make costumes. He took her to a group of people seated on the floor, and seeing that she was introduced, he went back to work. But he returned frequently to see how she was doing, and each time he came, Carol felt her heart beat a little faster.

The time passed quickly. She felt at home with the friendly little bunch and even though she was still a bit shy with them, Carol enjoyed their company.

Two hours later, Jim interrupted the work in progress. He asked everyone to form a circle around him. Carol seated herself with the others and waited expectantly.

Jim smiled at her, then his gaze took in the entire group.

"A few days ago I got an idea for a new play. You all know this is supposed to be a community workshop, but so far we've been having trouble interesting the neighborhood in our stuff. So here's what I thought we might do—put on a play about the Gowanus Monster."

A woman with a tape measure around her neck said, "That's a great idea, Jim. Tomorrow I'll go to the library and do some research for the costumes."

Everyone else voiced his approval and then all went back to work.

At ten o'clock the session was over. Jim offered to drive Mary and Carol home. But first they stopped for coffee.

"What's all this Gowanus business?" Mary asked.

"Oh, I'm sorry. I forgot that we

had talked about it before you joined," apologized Jim. "And of course, Carol, you don't know about this guy either. It's a silly story about the early inhabitants of lower Manhattan—the Dutch. About three hundred years ago, a rich burgher wanted the land a poor farmer had. The guy refused to sell at any price and the rich man took him to court on the trumped-up charge of witchcraft. I guess in those days being a sorcerer was pretty hard to prove one way or the other—because even though the burgher won the case, the farmer wasn't hanged, just banished. Well, the rich guy bought the land from the town for a very low price. But he didn't live long enough to enjoy it. He was found strangled the next week. A note next to the body said words to the effect that the farmer had gotten his revenge, but he would go further than that. He vowed he'd never leave the land again. And according to tradition, he hasn't . . ."

"You're right. It is a silly story," remarked Carol. "By the way, when was the last time he was seen?"

"About 1890—by a half-drunk cleaning lady who probably imagined the whole thing. Don't get me wrong, lady. I just tell them; I don't believe them. But since it is such a popular story in the neighborhood, they might enjoy seeing all of us super-talents putting it on for them."

Later that same night, Carol lay awake thinking of Jim. He was so strong, capable and kind—the first guy who had ever shown any attention to her in a long time. He had been so insistent that she go to the next meeting to be held the following week. It was funny, but now she could never imagine now knowing him.

THE REHEARSALS for the play were hard work and Carol was amazed at the amount of effort that went into even such a small production. Lines had to be memorized, costumes made, sets to be painted and nailed into place. Hardly before she realized it, opening night was just days away. She knew all her lines by heart. Of course her part was very small—she'd be one of the people at the trial who had been bribed by the burgher to say that the farmer was a sorcerer and had conjured up the Devil—but still it was an important thing for her.

The way the play was arranged would allow for the same man to

play both the farmer and the monster. Carol came across the costume by accident in the dressing room and for a moment she was terrified by it—a collection of ancient material hanging in rags and some straw.

Jim came up when she was nervously admiring the workmanship.

"I looked up the description of what this monster guy is supposed to look like, and according to the library archives, he wears this suit. He must be very uncomfortable in the summer."

"And what if the poor goon had hay fever?" Carol joked. "With all that sneezing he'd never be able to sneak up on anybody."

On opening night the audience was seated in the huge loft waiting impatiently for the curtain to go up. There were almost 200 on-lookers, and the stage, although plain and clearly the work of dedicated amateurs, was a good-sized one; but both the people and the equipment seemed unable to fill the soft darkness that surrounded everyone like velvet.

The curtain went up to reveal all the characters more or less accurately clothed in the seventeenth-century garb of the early Dutch settlers. The play would begin with the burgher's greed, go into the trial scene, and end with the poor farmer's banishment. After the intermission, the little show would take on a more supernatural tone and depict the farmer's meeting two real witches on the road. These lovelies would teach him spells enough to be able to seek revenge and stay on the earth forever guarding his property. It wasn't a great play, but it was fun for both the audience and the actors.

Oddly enough, everything went perfectly on schedule. Carol was sure that she'd forget her few lines, but to her surprise, not only could she remember them, she could also say them well. She was even applauded after her little speech.

During intermission, Jim went over to congratulate her. Then he said, "Listen, the girl who was going to play one of the witches suddenly got sick. Do you think you could take her part, Carol? There are only a few lines you have to know."

She agreed and had Mary, who was to play the other witch, help her memorize the part and get into the costume.

The curtain opened after only a slight pause to show Carol and Mary seated on a rock. The

audience gasped because in the dim lights of the stage, the girls looked terrifying.

The farmer-monster came along—but he had made a mistake. He wasn't supposed to be in the Gowanus costume until after the witches pronounced the spell.

"If that's the only mistake we'll make all evening," Carol thought to herself, "we're still pretty well off. OK, here goes." And she spoke her lines clearly and convincingly.

But the actor had forgotten his speech.

Carol repeated the lines and under her breath, gave the man his cue.

When he still didn't answer, Mary said her lines.

By this time the audience was giggling. Jim was standing in the wings whispering the man's lines, but he had either gone deaf or had such a case of stage fright that prompting was useless.

Jim motioned silently for someone to bring down the curtain. They'd start the scene all over. But before the square of material blocked the actors from the audience, the man in costume decided to act—only he wasn't following the script.

With a grunt, he knocked Carol off the cardboard rock. Then grabbing her about the waist, he rapidly half-carried, half-dropped the girl off into the darkness.

Jim was having a fit. "That jerk—he'll ruin everything!" Then he gave a start. An identical monster was coming toward him! This one was rubbing his head.

"Hey, Jim, I don't know what happened. I just woke up in the broom closet. Somebody must have . . ."

"My God! Who's with Carol!"

He flung himself into the darkness that surrounded the stage, trying to find a trail of Carol and her captor. It was hopeless. The loft was huge.

"Somebody—turn on the house lights!"

In a moment the area was bathed in harsh glare—but too late. The thing carrying Carol had vanished into the night.

The audience panicked. Grabbing a microphone, the assistant director tried to calm the mob down. Tearing and clawing each other, they blocked the exits, attempting to escape from something they weren't even sure of.

It was impossible for Jim to leave the building in search of Carol.

The fire escape! Through an open

window, he climbed the shaky ladder to the roof. There, he would cross over to the ladder leading down to the ground.

A scream cut through the night as Carol discovered the thing holding her was no actor dressed in a weird costume. She beat on its deathly chest—but her attempts only served to raise a cloud of dust on the creature.

"Jim—for God's sake, help me!"

He heard the shout and looking down from the vantage point, saw the thing and its unwilling slave turn a corner and disappear behind a group of empty warehouses. Another muffled scream issued from far away.

Jim raced down the ladder and ran to the buildings, trying to rescue Carol from an unknown fate.

Gasping for breath, he hugged a lamp post for support, his lungs ready to burst, his head cast down in despair. Straw on the ground! With a bolt he shot ahead, mindless of the screaming agony within his chest, following the flimsy trail of rotting hay until he came to a dead end. An alley leading to a brick wall ended the chase.

"Damn!" They had to be there somewhere. They couldn't have vanished into thin air. "Carol—Carol, can you hear me?"

"Over here!" came a voice a million miles away. "Jim, hurry! He's trying to . . ."

The voice faded away amidst a hundred echoes.

Echoes! The pair must be in some sort of tunnel—but where? There wasn't a sign of one in sight.

"That's it!" Jim cried out loud. "The abandoned subway!"

IT HAD BEEN closed off for forty years when the train route was switched. The entrance was in the next alley. Racing to it, he found garbage, crates, and other rubble from the dismantled factories blocking the way. The monster must have discovered another means into the pit.

Working against time, Jim painfully clawed a path through the debris until he formed a hole large enough to let him into the long-unused tunnel.

Rats and other disgusting creatures of slime and darkness scuttled across his path in terror as he groped his way past the dim, comforting twilight of night and into the stench-ridden pit.

"Carol!" he called, but only echoes returned to mock him. The water, stagnant and alive with

maggots, forming on the floor of the tunnel became deeper and deeper until it reached his neck.

"Ugg!" A worm had crawled into his mouth. He spat out the nauseating animal and tried to focus his hearing behind the ringing silence and deafening pitch of water falling drop by drop from the sweating walls.

A groan, almost at his ear, caused Jim to turn suddenly, lose his balance, and fall headlong into the foul liquid. He surfaced rapidly and tossed hair out of his eyes.

The moan had been mere yards away.

A car drove overhead, giving momentary light to the scene. For that fraction of a second, before the headlight's glare disappeared, Jim saw Carol! She was only yards away from him—but separated by a barbed wire fence. Her eyes made no sign of recognition in that precious instant of light. She looked dead, uncaring, hopeless.

Jim stumbled in the direction he thought she was, but couldn't find her again.

He tore both hands trying to find an empty space in the resisting wall of metal. It seemed like miles before he discovered a spot where the old iron had rusted through. Easing himself carefully between the strands of wire, he was now on the opposite side of the tunnel and started retracing his steps. The ground was harder, no surface water because the floor of the tunnel slanted.

Something grabbed him around the neck! In darkness, it was impossible to make out the features, but Jim felt harsh burlap and stinging straw mesh themselves tighter around him. He could scarcely breathe and in a moment he'd pass out. Frantically his brain raced ahead.

He called out: "Quick, get him!"

The monster whirled about, expecting to encounter more adversaries trespassing his land. Jim used that instant of grace the only way he could. He flung himself full force. Like a pile of dry sticks, the thing toppled over. Jim jumped down on its chest, trying to cave in the re-activated corpse's chest. But it seemed to be made of iron.

Wait—like dry sticks! It must be afraid of water!

Jim used what remained of his spent strength to heave the foul thing over barbed wire into an equally foul liquid.

The creature grunted, moaned, then finally howled as moisture

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caressing voice.

"Yeah, I want revenge."

Elsa told him the spell. It was strange but she had already taught him most of it anyway. They would send Myra's lover out on an errand; the lights in the house would go out; a rope would walk in from the garage and strangle her--that was all.

Together they said the spell and Ralph felt relief flood his soul. But immediately after pronouncing the fatal words, everything became deathly quiet.

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"God, Elsa--what's happening to you?"

In the flickering light of the open fire, the girl seemed to be aging right in front of his eyes. Soft skin became wrinkled, eyes bagged, erect posture stooped and shriveled.

Elsa cackled. "You fool. A witch can take on any form she wants. I knew all about you even before you got out of the car. It was simple to make myself look like Myra. Now you see me as I really am." She took a mirror from the wall and gazed into it. "Very pretty. But not as pretty as your precious Myra right now!"

"Myra! My God--I've killed her!"

"Yes, you did. Now listen fool," Elsa's voice took on a hard edge, "even though you had the power all your life, you were pure, innocent until you used it. Look at yourself now!"

She handed Ralph the square of cracked looking glass. He took it. With hands that visibly trembled, he raised the mirror to his eyes.

"Aahh!" he screamed and flung the mirror from his sight. A hideous monster was reflected in the glass. Green-red teeth set in a lop-sided mouth, bulging blood-shot eyes, a nose hanging down past a triple-cleft chin--a mockery of the human form!

Elsa's words dripped scorn for the thing that cowered before her. "As the bride of Satan, I am commanded to bring recruits into his service. You are now the slave of Satan--for all eternity!"

Ralph whimpered in fear at her feet.

"Go now, idiot. To everyone else you will appear normal. But only we know what you really are. The slightest command by either my husband or me you shall follow immediately."

She spat out her disgust as tongues of flame shot from her outstretched hands. Ralph felt them enter his body, and howled in anguish. Unbearable pain gripped his heart.

"Get out of my sight until I call you back again!"

Moaning in agony, Ralph crawled out into the night.

THE END

MAD MONSTER

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seeped into the arid creases of dried-out leather.

Jim fumbled in darkness for the unprotesting Carol. He found her and ran down the tunnel, echoes of a thing in agony ringing in his ears. Pitch, black, dark, then grey as they

approached the entrance.

The pair exploded through rubble as the escape was made good.

A crowd had gathered. Mary struggled free from the mass and ran to them. She helped support Carol's wilted body.

She looked over the unconscious girl's tangled hair and asked: "What happened?"

As the police came to take charge, Jim murmured slowly, "I really don't know. Maybe it thought it had to defend its property again. Perhaps we dreamed the whole thing. I can't say anymore." THE END

LAST DEATH PROWL

(Continued from page 25)

element, the one that changes you into a wolf. The book says that only a few of these third cells are present in the victim's blood. But your blood must be full of them. They remain in the marrow and appear only during the times when you are a wolf. The white corpuscles will gorge on them and leave the oxygen-carrying red cells alone."

Charles wasn't sure.

"Nonsense, it might work. You've got nothing to lose. There'll be a full moon in three nights. Come back then."

Charles did. He walked into the library and was amazed at the transformation. The windows were almost completely boarded up—only a small clink in the wooden armour let in any sunlight. There was also a huge lock on the door, bolted from the outside.

"My landlady things I've gone insane," the Professor chuckled as he hammered the last board into place. He called, "All right, Mrs. Allen, you can lock us in now."

"But what if this doesn't work and I attack you? You know I have no control over myself as a wolf."

"Don't worry about that. I can hold you at bay if we're unsuccessful. I've taken the liberty of borrowing some of Mrs. Allen's silver jewelry." He pulled aside his shirt to show Charles a garish assortment of rings, chains, crosses and necklaces tied across his withered chest. "Not in very good taste, but it's certainly functional."

Charles and his elderly friend waited for the rising of the moon. When the first beams came shyly through the opening left for it in the boarded-up window, Charles felt the stirring in his body. He groaned, writhed in agony on the floor. He moaned, clutched his face to his tense hands.

But nothing else came of it.